

## Details on the Cultural Revolution

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### The Cultural Revolution (1966–1969)

- After the failure of the Great Leap Forward, communist leaders focused on rebuilding the ruined economy. Mao feared, however, that the new successes of economic recovery in the early 1960s created a society concerned most with making money. Mao believed this threatened the socialist spirit of the revolution. In 1966 Mao concluded that modern China needed a cultural revolution to rid itself of what he referred to as the Four Olds—old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits—that were rooted in pre-revolutionary culture.
- Many leaders in the Communist Party opposed Mao's plan to reverse the successful economic recovery. So, Mao turned to young people across China, later called Red Guards, to guard the culture of the revolution. Red Guards did this by humiliating and imprisoning “enemies” of the people, primarily educated Chinese, city dwellers, and corrupt Communist Party officials. Mao published a book of his quotations, known in western nations as the *Little Red Book*, which all Red Guards carried with them. Millions of high school and university students marched in the streets shouting slogans in unison and punishing anyone not following the “politically correct” ideas of Mao. They traveled all over the country wreaking havoc. They raided homes and destroyed anything remotely associated with the Four Olds, including western-style clothes, books, and paintings. They also destroyed precious art objects in museums and Buddhists shrines. Meanwhile, Mao quickly regained control of the Communist Party from leaders who favored a more moderate approach.
- Communist leaders lost control of the Cultural Revolution. Within two years, it brought China to the brink of anarchy (absence of government authority and order). At first, even after Red Guards beat people to death, the police and the military were under orders from Mao not to interfere. By 1967 organized marches had become angry mobs that attacked teachers, civic leaders, and foreign diplomats. Thousands died, and hundreds of thousands of citizens were imprisoned. Many temples, historical monuments, and valuable books were destroyed. In 1969 Mao recognized the excesses of the Red Guards. He called on them to disband and allowed the military to impose law and order.

### Aftermath of the Cultural Revolution (1969–1976)

- As Mao became old and ill in the early 1970s, his wife, Jiang Qing, gained powerful influence in the Communist Party and continued many radical policies of the Cultural Revolution. But when Mao died in 1976, his wife and three radical colleagues, known as the Gang of Four, were arrested for trying to overthrow the government and causing the deaths of 34,000 people during the Cultural Revolution. By 1979 Deng Xiaoping, a leader twice disgraced by Mao, secured control of the Communist Party and again shifted government policy toward encouraging economic development. He condemned the Cultural Revolution and called for “less empty talk and more hard work.”



## Picture Representing the Cultural Revolution



*Here we see members of the Red Guards displaying the leaders of "Anti-Revolutionary Groups" from trucks in February 1967. The accused, wearing dunce caps, were held to public shame on a Beijing street.*